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SUBJECT: ELECTION UPDATE: TORIES LIKELY TO SWEEP ALBERTA? NDP RETURN  
TO SASKATCHEWAN LOOKS HOPEFUL

REF: OTTAWA 3523

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Alberta: A Tory Sweep?  
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[1](#)1. Three weeks into the federal election campaign little has changed with respect to our initial sense that Alberta, with 26 of its 28 seats held by the Conservative Party of Canada, will unquestionably remain a Tory fortress. Federal party leaders recently made their first brief foray into this Tory stronghold. While many expect Conservative Party Leader Stephen Harper will need to do little more than make a "token appearance," future campaign appearances by Martin and Layton are likely to be few and far in between. That said, two seats will be "hot" and up for grabs in this province. Opinion is mixed on the outcome of the most critical race in Edmonton Centre, the riding currently held by Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan. In the past two elections, McLellan has triumphed over her Conservative rivals by the slimmest of margins, just a few hundred votes. While some maintain that McLellan's time has come and she will lose her seat to Conservative Party rival and former F-18 fighter pilot Laurie Hawn, the editorial page editor for the Edmonton Journal recently told post's PA Representative that he would "bet a C-note (C\$100) she keeps her seat." (Hawn lost to McLellan in 2004 by less than 700 votes.) On the other hand, Alberta Liberal MLA David Swann told CG on December 19 that he sees an even greater uphill battle for McLellan, and any gains by the Liberal Party are extremely unlikely. Swann, who won his Calgary seat in this year's provincial election, believes that Albertans have even less of an appetite for anything Liberal primarily because of controversy surrounding the Gomery inquiry. Similarly, Conservative Calgary MP Art Hanger told us that Hawn will run a more aggressive campaign against McLellan and the Tories are confident of unseating her this time around.

[1](#)2. The only other Alberta race of note is Edmonton Beaumont, where incumbent David Kilgour is stepping down, but not before taking a final parting shot at his former party. Kilgour, who left the Liberals to sit as an Independent in April 2005, said the federal Liberals' behavior and the Prime Minister's comments during the early days of the campaign (particularly with respect to comments made in B.C. on Senate Reform) have offended him to the point that he feels more aligned with the Conservatives. Kilgour, who said Edmonton Beaumont voters like him, but concede "it's time for a change," predicted that Conservative candidate Mike Lake would handily win the riding. Kilgour squeaked by Conservative candidate Tim Uppal last year with only 134 votes. Harper was in Edmonton over the weekend campaigning for Lake.

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Saskatchewan - NDP To Return A Mix of All Three Parties?  
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[1](#)3. In the 2004 federal election, Saskatchewanians gave the Tories 13 seats and the Liberals one - Finance Minister Ralph Goodale. But for the first time in memory, the NDP claimed not a single federal seat in that province, losing the two it had. Four seats, including that of veteran NDP MP Lorne Nystrom, were lost by such slim margins that the NDP in Saskatchewan believe they have a chance to return to a mix of all three parties on January 23. Nystrom, an MP first elected in 1968, believes voters were swayed late in the campaign to "strategically vote," leading to vote-splitting. Nystrom lost his seat by a mere 881 votes in 2004, and claims electors marked their ballot for Liberals in order to halt the Conservatives, pushing the NDP out. Nystrom said he will remind electors that the only way to stop the Conservatives in Saskatchewan is to stay with the NDP, and he believes the vote will come down to who can get a "fair deal" for Saskatchewan on the structure of equalization payments and other issues. Saskatchewan NDP Premier Lorne Calvert has been campaigning on the fair deal issue ever since Ottawa inked an energy deal with Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Shortly after the election call, Calvert was quick to weigh in and announce that he may take a more public role in the federal campaign believing that, should the NDP once again hold the balance of power in parliament, his province could wield more influence.

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NWT Premier Lobbies Candidate "On-Side" With NWT-Ottawa  
Revenue-Sharing  
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14. Meanwhile, Northwest Territories (NWT) Premier Joseph Handley says he will consider switching support to another federal party if it is willing to commit to northern social programs and a resource revenue-sharing agreement. Premier Handley, in fact, has written to leaders of the federal parties asking for their position on four key issues including resource revenue-sharing, base-plus funding agreements, the Mackenzie Gas pipeline, and the Mackenzie Valley Highway. Premier Handley has asked for a response from party leaders by January 9, 2006. While the NWT has only one federal seat, which has been held by Liberal Ethel Blondin-Andrew since 1988, all three parties have candidates in the running. Blondin-Andrew inched by her NDP opponent in the Western Arctic riding by a mere 53 votes in 2004.

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Comment  
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15. Most observers agree that neither the parties nor the voters will completely focus on the campaign until the holidays are complete, and that's when candidates are expected to start paying attention. The issues that resonate in this part of the country largely parallel those found elsewhere - health care, economy and corruption. While U.S.- Canada relations is not high in the minds of the voting public, the Federal Government's failure to deal with "western alienation" continues to irk many of the people here. That said, the best the Liberals can hope for in Alberta is to retain their ace - Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan, who is well liked and respected. McLellan has always found a way to cobble together a winning coalition and it would be a mistake to write her off just yet. One thing that she has going for her is that she is liked and respected for her hard work and constituent service, even by the Conservatives at large. The NDP, in the meantime, may have their own ace - a stronger NDP presence in Ottawa if candidates in Saskatchewan, as well as the NWT, make some inroads, a scenario that appears to be gaining more credibility as the campaign moves forward.

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